



## **Child Care Assistance**

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) offers financial assistance to eligible parents to help them with child care costs while they engage in work or training efforts. The agency is responsible for regulating all child care settings in Ohio, from large child care centers to family child care homes. Every day in Ohio, an estimated 292,000 children are cared for in settings outside the home that are regulated by ODJFS.

Of those children, approximately 116,000 receive financial assistance for child care each month. This assistance allows low-income parents to find and keep jobs, and it ensures that their children have access to an early care and education experience they need to succeed in school. Ohio's 88 county departments of job and family services determine families' eligibility for publicly funded child care services. ODJFS then makes payments to providers for the costs of that care, based on a local market rate survey.

### **Who can get child care assistance?**

To become eligible for publicly funded child care, a family's income must be below 125 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). After that, families may remain eligible unless their income becomes greater than 200 percent of the FPL. Families can be eligible for all or part of their monthly child care expenses.

### **How often is eligibility determined?**

The county departments of job and family services review cases every 12 months to decide whether income or other changes affect eligibility.

### **How is child care assistance paid?**

Ohio uses a swipe card system to record the time and attendance of children receiving publicly funded child care. Parents or guardians simply swipe the Ohio Electronic Child Care card when dropping off their children and swipe it again when picking them up. ODJFS then issues direct deposit payments to providers to reimburse them for the time they spend caring for children in the program. The card is easy to use, reduces fraud and greatly increases payment accuracy.

### **How often are child care programs inspected?**

Child care providers serving seven or more children are subject to up to two unannounced inspections by ODJFS licensing specialists each year. For smaller programs serving six or fewer children, county departments of job and family services conduct one scheduled and one unannounced inspection each year. ODJFS reviews county agencies twice a year to ensure they are adequately inspecting providers. ODJFS also offers training and guidance to providers to help them improve the quality of care.

All child care providers and staff are subject to criminal background checks, including staff who have no direct contact with children, such as cooks and custodians. For in-home providers, all residents of the home 18 years and older must complete background checks. In addition, ODJFS sends a list of all child care providers to the Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association so county sheriffs can cross-check that list with their local sex offender registries.

### How can a family find child care?

Families searching for child care in Ohio should visit <http://jfs.ohio.gov/CDC/childcare.stm>. This website allows families to search for child care by county, city, zip code, program type and Step UpTo Quality rating. Families also can search for specific providers and view their past inspection reports.

Step UpTo Quality is Ohio's quality rating system for child care programs. ODJFS and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) now use a comprehensive, one- to five-star rating system to assess ODJFS- and ODE-funded early childhood programs that choose to exceed minimum health and safety standards. Starting in 2020, all child care providers that receive state funding will be required to participate in Step UpTo Quality. Ratings are posted online, and parents can use them to choose the provider that is best for their child. Highly rated programs require continuing education for teachers and staff, use child assessments to guide learning and development, and take additional steps to help prepare children for kindergarten.